

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated April 19, 2006. Claims 1 to 21, 25 to 28 and 31 to 46 are in the application, with Claims 23, 24, 29 and 30 having been cancelled herein. Claims 1, 6, 11, 12, 26 and 32 to 44 are independent. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 6 and 36 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) over U.S. Patent Publication No. 2004/0231003 (Cooper); Claims 1 to 7, 10 to 14, 18 to 21 and 23 to 46 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,686,954 (Yoshinobu) in view of Cooper; Claims 8 and 9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Yoshinobu in view of Cooper, and in further view of U.S. Patent No. 5,758,259 (Lawler); Claim 15 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Yoshinobu in view of Cooper, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,642,939 (Vallone); and Claims 16 and 17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Yoshinobu in view of Cooper, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,002,394 (Schein).

Applicants note that Cooper's earliest U.S. filing date is December 30, 1999, while the subject application's earliest Japanese priority date is December 3, 1999. Therefore, Applicants submit herewith a sworn translation of priority application Japan 11-344565, filed on December 3, 1999. In accordance with MPEP § 201.15, the Examiner is urged to confirm that Applicants are entitled to the December 3, 1999 priority date under 35 U.S.C. § 119 and once the Examiner is satisfied, it is respectfully requested that Cooper be removed as a reference against each of the rejected claims supported by the sworn translation.

No other matters having been raised, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance and such action is respectfully requested at the Examiner's earliest convenience.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank E. Cire', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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